



Living with Mammals update 2017

In 2017, *Living with Mammals* clocked up over 10,000 hours of survey time, across 525 sites — equivalent to around fourteen months of continuous observation. Alongside stalwarts of the survey, 147 people took part for the first time, giving up their time and knowledge to record mammals. This is an extraordinary achievement, so to everyone involved, thank you!

How populations are changing

Five species (or families of species, such as 'bats' or 'mice') showed a change in 2017 compared with 2004, the baseline year for the survey (table on page 2). This year, there were proportionately fewer records of bats, mice and brown hares, and more records of brown rats and muntjac deer. In addition, two species — hedgehogs and rabbits — showed declines in the proportion of sites at which they were

recorded, while badgers showed an increase.

Hedgehogs

Ten years ago, hedgehogs were made a priority species for conservation efforts in the UK, based on increasing evidence that numbers were falling. In 2018 PTES and the British Hedgehog Preservation Society will publish an updated *State of Britain's Hedgehogs* report.

Several surveys, undertaken by PTES and others, suggested hedgehogs were declining both in rural and urban landscapes. This year, for the first time, the picture in our towns and cities might be more hopeful.

Between 2004 and 2014, the proportion of sites reporting hedgehogs or their signs fell between a quarter and a third (Figure 1). Since then, however, the decline

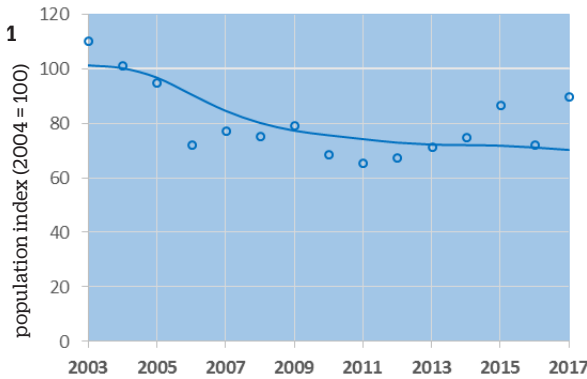
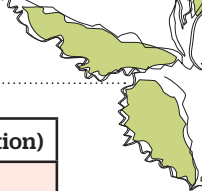


Figure 1 The proportion of sites recording hedgehogs or signs of hedgehogs. The smoothed trend line evens out year-to-year fluctuations, showing the underlying change. The value for each year is expressed relative to that in 2004, which is taken as the baseline year and given a value of '100'. The value in 2017 is 30% less than that in 2004. Average weekly counts of hedgehogs at each site, relative to that in 2004, are shown by the circles. These suggest that numbers may be improving.



species	weekly count (abundance)	proportion of sites (distribution)
brown hare	↓	-
bats	↓	↓
mice	↓	↓
hedgehogs	no change	↓
rabbit	no change	↓
brown rat	↑	↑
muntjac	↑	↑
badger	no change	↑

Species showing a change this year compared with 2004. A change in the average weekly count suggests a change in abundance; while the proportion of sites recording a species reflects distribution. Foxes, grey squirrels, roe deer, voles, shrews and moles showed no difference in either measure. For scarcer species, more data are needed to be confident of changes.

has slowed and the trend has flattened. Interestingly, there is some evidence from weekly counts of hedgehogs at each site (circles in Figure 1) that numbers are improving.

What does this mean for hedgehogs? Hedgehogs are found at fewer sites today than they were fifteen years ago, but where they remain, their numbers might be increasing. Wildlife needs good, accessible habitats, and higher numbers could be a result of hedgehogs squeezing into fewer suitable sites. Real success will

be seeing hedgehogs in more gardens and green spaces, and ensuring these are joined up places where hedgehogs can thrive.

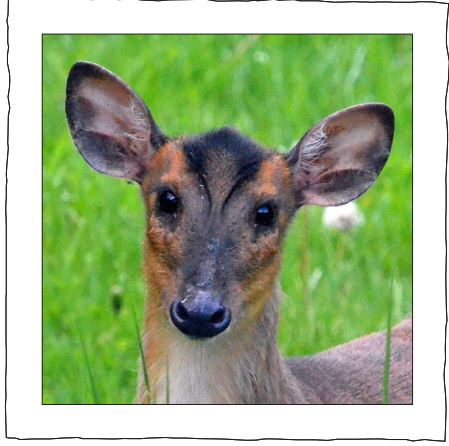
Thousands of people and campaigns such as *Hedgehog Street* are helping to improve urban habitats for hedgehogs. If we're to find out whether a corner has really been turned, continued effort and long-term data collection are essential.

Bats

In each of the last three years of *Living with Mammals*, bats were recorded at fewer sites than hedgehogs (222 and 227 respectively in 2017). Prior to 2015, the opposite was always true.

Both the proportion of weekly records and the proportion of sites where bats were recorded show significant declines since 2004 (Figure 2a).

In urban and suburban environments, bats most likely to be encountered are common and soprano pipistrelles. Field surveys of common pipistrelles, run by the Bat Conservation Trust across the country, indicate an increase in the population over the period of *Living with Mammals*, so the



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pressures on bats in towns and cities may be particular to the built environment.

Rabbits and hares

Rabbits can be common in the urban fringes around towns, taking advantage of the bounties offered by gardens and allotments. They were recorded at about a fifth of sites in *Living with Mammals*. But the proportion of sites recording rabbits has fallen by 15% since 2004 (the blue line in Figure 2b). The proportion of weekly records has also fallen. It's harder to be confident about the size of the change, however, because of more year-to-year variation. Statistically, the value in 2017 isn't different to that in 2004.

In contrast to bats, the picture for rabbits from our *Mammals on Roads* survey and mammal records collected in the British Trust for Ornithology's *Breeding Bird Survey*, is similar in the wider landscape. Since the start of *Living with Mammals*, records in rural areas have fallen by almost a half.

Few gardeners, perhaps, appreciate rabbits close to home, but they play an important role in our countryside. They're eaten by raptors and other predators, and maintain chalk grassland habitats and the wildlife that these in turn support. Sharing our gardens with them, at least a little, might just be

Figure 2a Bats

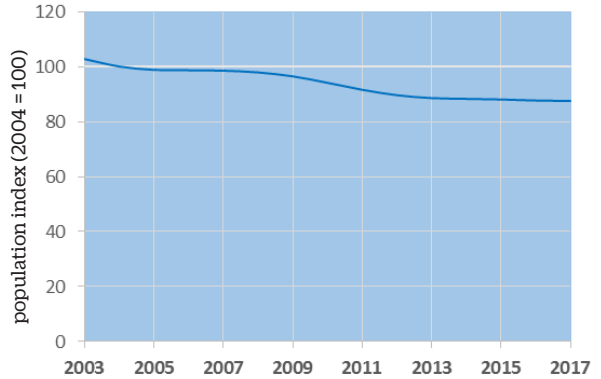


Figure 2b Rabbits

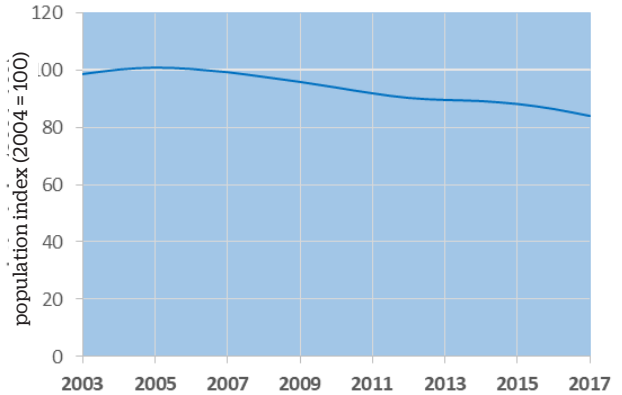


Figure 2c Muntjac

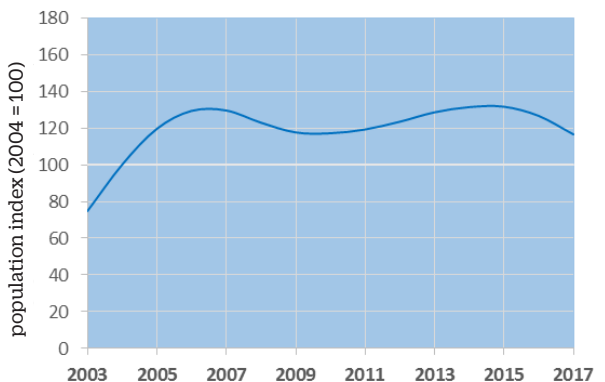


Figure 2 Smoothed trends for bats (a), rabbits (b) and muntjac (c).

One in five sites recorded badgers this year and the proportion of sites shows no underlying change since 2004. Weekly counts of badgers have increased, however, although it's still unusual to see this many!



important in ensuring their presence in years to come.

Brown hares are recorded at only a few sites each year but there's some evidence that their population has declined too. This year, the proportion of weekly records of hares in *Living with Mammals* was two thirds less than when the survey began.

Deer

Like rabbits, small deer, such as roe and muntjac, occupy urban fringes, using gardens, allotments and larger green spaces. In 2017, muntjac and roe deer were recorded at four and nine percent of sites respectively. Neither showed a change in the proportion of sites at which they were recorded, but the proportion of weekly records of muntjac was two-thirds greater than in 2004. At more rural sites, the BTO's *Breeding Bird Survey* shows similar increases in both species. Where

they co-exist, however, muntjac appear to out-compete roe deer and it's interesting that, at sites in *Living with Mammals*, only muntjac show an increase.

Urban environments are busy places. They're home to four-fifths of us in Britain and are continually changing. Habitats are lost and created, improved and worsened, and wildlife changes. Our wild neighbours improve the quality of our towns and cities, clearing food waste from our streets, keeping in check those we might consider pests and indicating a deeper environmental health that provides us with clean air, pollinated crops and flood protection. Without them, we are worse off. So keeping a regular eye on wild mammals on our doorstep, is important.

Thank you for taking part this year and we hope you can do so again in 2018!

Find out more

Urban Mammals: a concise guide

David Wembridge

(Whittet Books) An introduction to the 22 species that share our towns and cities, together with chapters on urban habitats, possible

conflicts and urban surveys. Brimming with information and with a foreword by Chris Packham. **We're offering you a special price of £7.50 with free p&p if you quote 'LWM17'** in our online shop or call us on 020 7498 4533.

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